

Tractor's power-backed DOOH solutions show advertisers light at the end of the load shedding tunnel

Issued by [Tractor Outdoor](#)

26 May 2023

Out of home media - specifically digital out of home (DOOH) media - has seen thousands of screens across the country go dark when load shedding kicks in. In response, one of South Africa's leading media owners, Tractor Outdoor, has designed a new power-backed solution to keep screens on, meeting the needs of its advertisers.



Mali Motsumi-Garrido, sales director at Tractor Outdoor, explains that Tractor is rolling out this solution in a two-phased approach, commencing at the end of June.

“Our first step is to deliver full battery-powered back-up of the network so that our screens can still operate when load shedding strikes. This solution is ‘solar-ready’, enabling solar technologies to be integrated in phase two.”

Motsumi-Garrido, says that the second phase will entail the full-scale roll-out of solar-powered solutions, integrated into key sites. “These will be connected to solar energy as well as other alternative energy sources where available.

“Not only will this allow us to continue to deliver our clients’ campaigns without interruption, but it will also take us one step closer to our sustainability goals,” she explains, adding that Tractor aims to become net zero in the near future. “We know that this is an audacious task, but we’ve never been content with maintaining the status quo. Our vision has always been to push boundaries in our quest to drive fundamental change for good, and we view load shedding not as a problem, but as a catalyst for change.”

South Africa’s ongoing energy crisis has impacted all types of electronic media, and the media industry has once again had to pivot – that pandemic buzzword – to retain audiences.

Television, as a medium, has seen viewers drop off at the speed of – ahem – light. In June 2022, when load shedding first started to escalate, TV audiences shrank by 34% in the first week of July 2022 compared to that same period the previous year. Digital media has also been dealt a blow; online channels have seen reduced audiences due to people either not having battery power, trying to save up on their power or loss of connectivity during load shedding windows.

Rather than think outside the box, media owners, buyers, planners and strategists have had to think 'off the grid', and digital out of home (DOOH) media is no exception.

However, Motsumi-Garrido says that DOOH is different from other electronic channels in that it is not necessarily losing audiences. "Unlike during 2020's lockdown, outdoor audiences are still out and about and, in many cases, these audiences are held captive even longer as a direct result of load shedding (think of commuters stuck in traffic exacerbated by traffic lights going off).

"Where DOOH is affected is in its loop-based campaigns: Advertisers purchase a specific number of ad plays, and when the power goes off, an ad cannot be served, and media owners generally build in a buffer to provide for this."

Motsumi-Garrido adds that Tractor's power-backed solutions are but one way the media owner is tackling the matter of load shedding – it also offers buyers optimised packages, which provide guaranteed impression-based buying.

"This means that we can commit to delivering a certain number of impressions to clients, based on their campaign objectives and location requirements. Moreover, clients can define the criteria for when they want their campaigns to run – for example, during rush hour, or when temperature drops or soars (ideal for seasonal goods such as ice cream or hot chocolate).

"Our optimised packages are billed based on impressions (the number of people exposed to the screens), which means that when they don't play, clients won't pay.

"In addition, our programmatic capabilities allow for in-depth reporting, allowing us to be completely transparent with our clients in showing them exactly when their ads were served. In this way, we can continue to show impact and return on investment."

Motsumi-Garrido concludes by saying that OOH has always been resilient and swift to adapt to environmental conditions. "The issue of load shedding is something that we set out to tackle, and we're extremely excited to introduce our power-backed solutions to the market.

"We've always invested ahead of the curve, integrating world-class systems and technologies into the operations of our business so that we can continue to deliver great value to our clients."

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